



Gender Identity and Campus Climate

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Introduction

While LGBT students as a whole often face disproportionate rates of violence and harassment, transgender students specifically face compounding rates above what minority students already experience (Jauk, 2013). Authors in the area of LGBT college students often cite a lack of research focus on transgender students specifically (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Because transgender college students face such unique challenges ranging from editing identification cards to securing appropriate housing accommodations (Beemyn, 2003), the present study sought to synthesize trends in existing literature and subsequently contribute to literature regarding transgender college students.

In order to better understand the challenges faced by gender expansive college students, the present study gathered data on gender labels used by students at a rural university in Texas, and assessed their perceptions of general campus climate concerning attitudes towards students who may not identify in a gender binary system, and examined student knowledge of university initiatives to foster gender diversity and inclusivity.

Method

Participants included 41 Angelo State University students: 65.9% identified themselves as a woman, 31.7% identified as a man, and 2.4% identified as gender neutral. Ages ranged from 18-38 ($M = 20.34$ years, $SD = 3.99$).

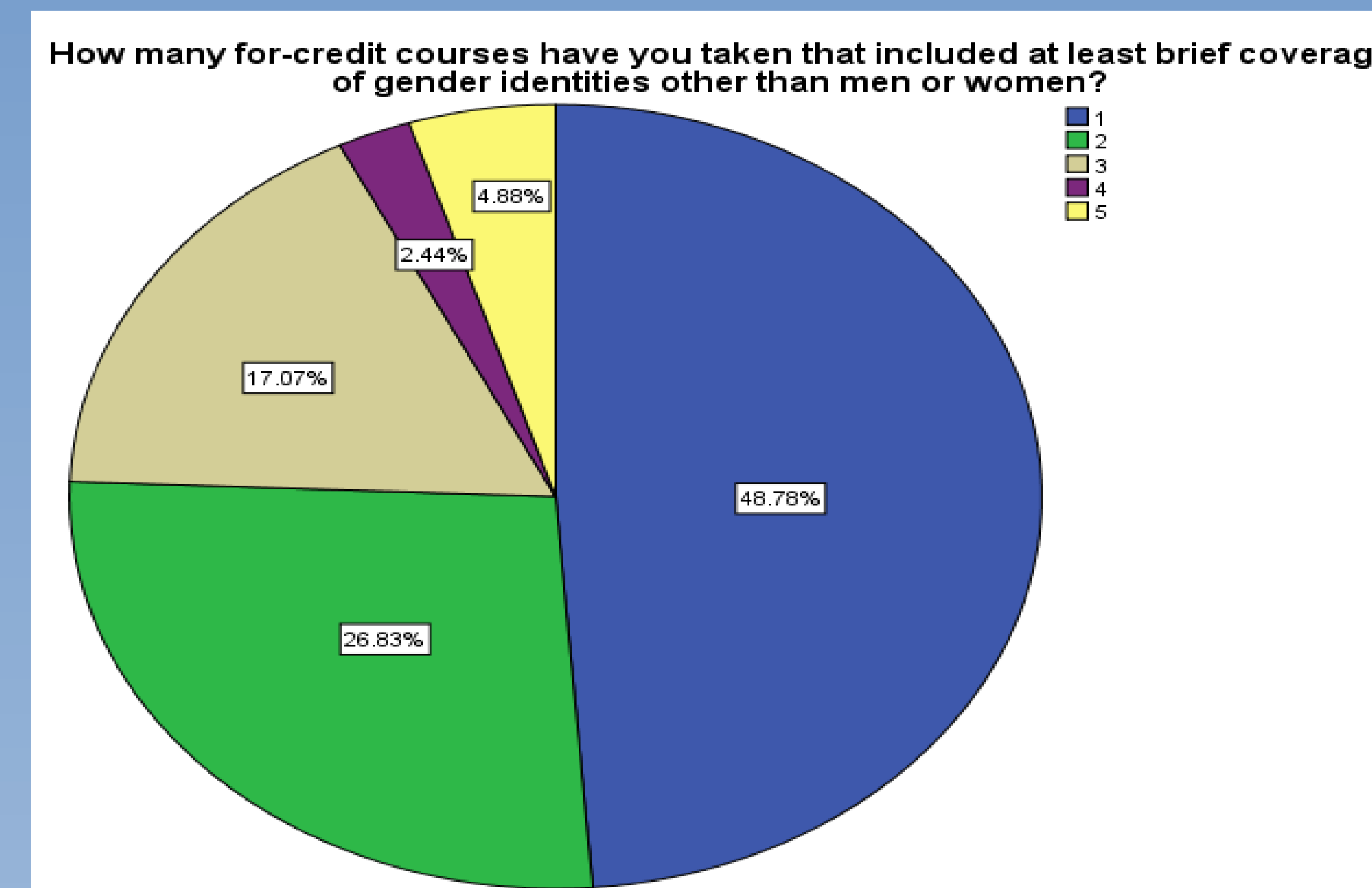
After providing informed consent, participants completed a demographics questionnaire designed specifically to inquire about gender labels used by the participants to identify themselves, which included a list of commonly-used gender labels that do not necessarily adhere to a binary gender system. All of the terms and definitions were compiled from resources maintained by the Heartland Trans Wellness Group and genderqueerid.com. Participants selected from the list of gender labels to indicate which labels most accurately reflect their sense of their own gender. These labels included identifiers such as 'cisgender' (man and woman), 'gender non-binary,' 'gender neutral,' and 'transgender.'

Participants were then asked to complete the Gender Attitudes and Climate Survey, which assessed student opinions, perceptions, and beliefs of campus diversity related to gender identity (Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998). Participants responded to questions such as, *My experiences since coming to school here have led me to become more understanding of gender differences*. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

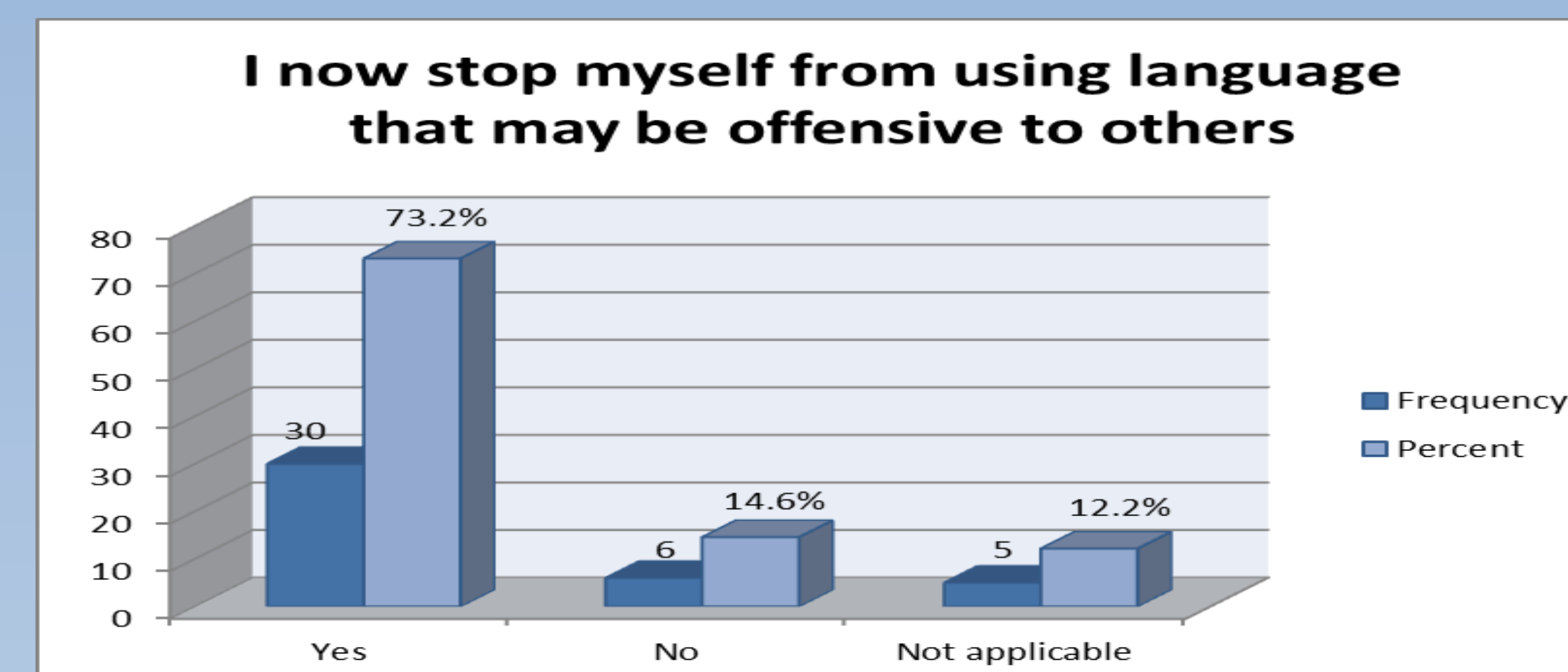
After completing both questionnaires, participants were thanked for their responses and were provided with additional information about the study.

Results

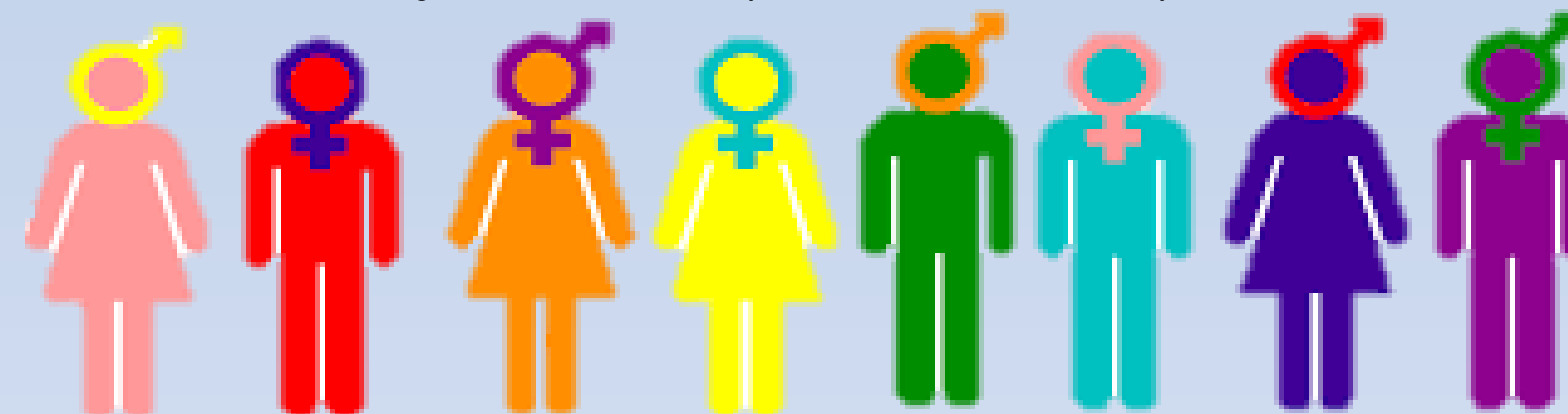
2.4% of participants identified as gender neutral. 65.9% of participants identified themselves as women, and 31.7% of participants identified themselves as men.



Because of experiences at ASU, 73.2% of participants changed the language they use to be more mindful of fellow students.

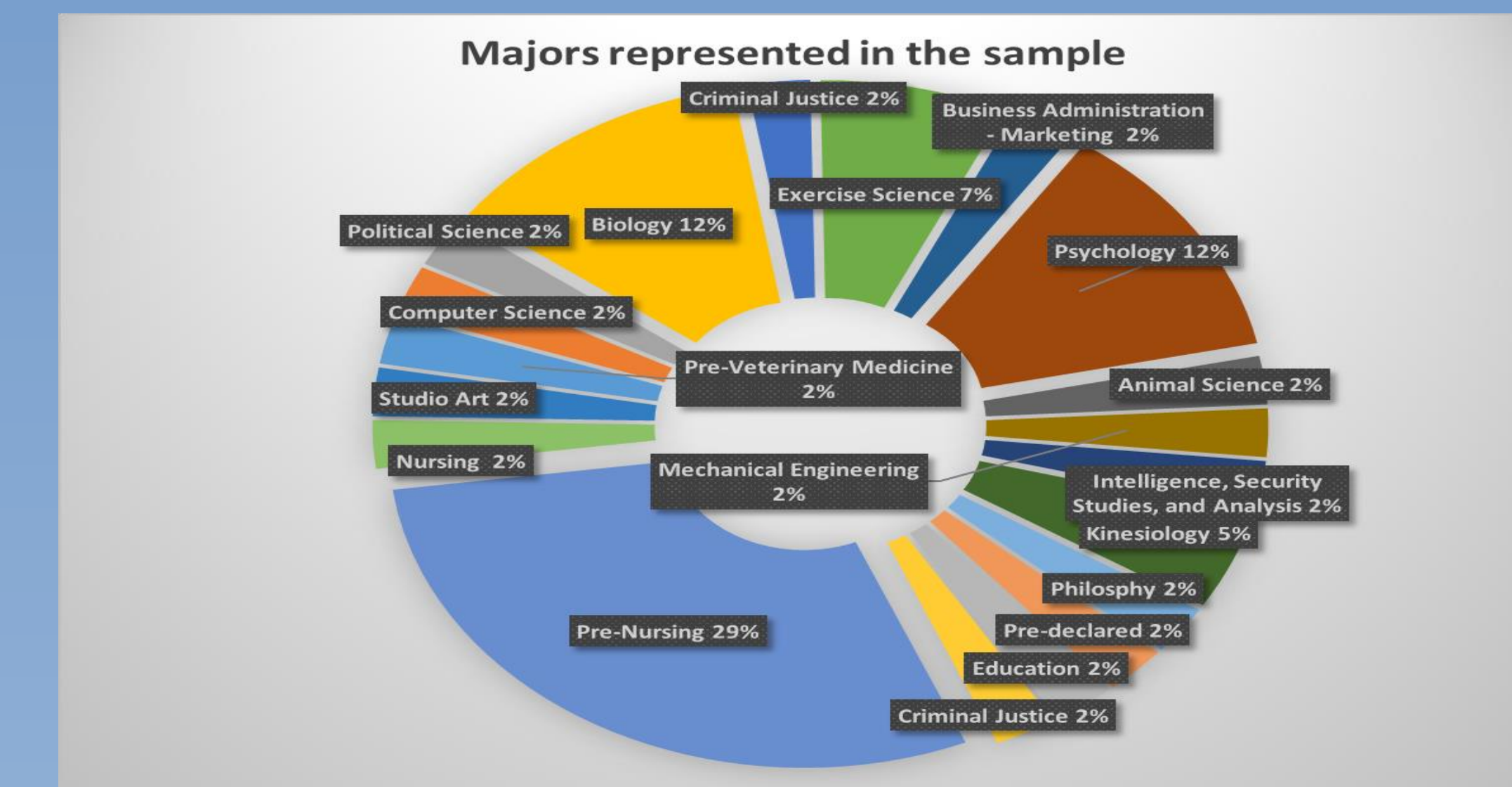


Students also responded to an open-ended question inquiring about suggestions to improve campus climate related to gender identity. Some students indicated that a training or presentation about misconceptions related to gender identity directed at faculty and first-year students could benefit campus climate. Other students replied that information should be more readily available about classes being offered about gender identity, and classes not specifically focused on gender identity might incorporate discussion on gender identity more informally.



Discussion

While the sample size did not contain a large number of students (N=41), the sample contained a wide variety of majors that represented many of the colleges at ASU.



One of the desired outcomes of the climate survey included assessing how students of gender-expansive identities perceive campus climate and how these students navigate campus life. While only a small portion of participants identified themselves as an identity other than 'man' or 'woman,' the survey still revealed valuable information about campus climate pertaining to different campus areas. For instance, 58.5% of participants agreed that attending programs on diversity contributes to the goal of building community, while 12.2% of participants strongly agreed in the same area.

Results also revealed that 73.2% of participants have often been exposed to a discriminatory atmosphere created in the classroom by faculty, and 61% of participants have often been exposed to a discriminatory atmosphere created by faculty outside the classroom.

Many students indicated that they enjoy the array of programs that ASU offers, especially programs arising from the Multicultural Center. Students replied that they enjoy open mingling spaces on campus such as the University Center and that more open community areas would be appreciated. Many of the students value ASU's current diversity efforts and look forward to continued growth and development in the area of recognizing gender identity diversity.

References

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